

## A BREAKFAST WITH SAMUEL ROGERS.

BY MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

THE person of all others whom I was anxious to see, in London, was Samuel Rogers, the poet of two generations, and the man of society. A presentation at court, or even an interview with Victoria, was nothing in comparison with a morning with Rogers.

Mrs. Sigourney, the woman of all others whom I most sincerely honor, had sent me a kind letter of introduction to Rogers, thus linking the two persons I love best to remember in one pleasant thought.

Of course the first drive we took—for there were three of us—was to Mr. Rogers' house. We passed by the old red brick palace of St. James, and up St. James street, a very quiet neighborhood, filled with lordly residences which shut in one side of that most heavenly spot, the Green Park. I should fancy the houses in that region were mostly occupied by people of distinction; and that death had been busy there, for in front of at least three of the dwellings we saw hatchments out and general signs of mourning, which gave something of gloom to the stillness of the street.



ROGERS, AGE 50: FROM MR. THOMAS LAWRENCE'S PORTRAIT.

The house of Mr. Rogers was plain enough in its front. We have fifty more imposing dwellings in every street of New York, or Philadelphia, whose owners do a retail business down town: but still it gave you an idea of superior refine-

ment, perhaps from the neatness of everything near, perhaps from the stillness that reigned around.

We rang the bell; a very gentlemanly young man came to the door, whose refined exterior gave you an idea of what the master must be.

"No, Mr. Rogers was not at home!"

We left Mrs. Sigourney's letter with cards, and drove away somewhat disappointed.

In less than an hour after our return to the hotel, a note reached us, one of the most delicately folded and delicately written notes I ever received.

"Would we do Mr. Rogers the favor of taking breakfast with him on the next morning?"

Of course we would! A few very brief words

conveyed this reply: and so to ten o'clock the next morning, after a little embarrassment about the kind of toilet proper for a breakfast of this kind, which ended in choosing a simple one, always sure to be correct in England, we started for St. James street. Again we rang, and this time the very gentlemanly servant, out of livery, admitted us into a broad, and almost square entrance hall, from whence a staircase of unpolished white marble led to the drawing-room, which, in London, is usually on the second floor.

At sixteen, in entering to a presence like that, my heart would have been in my mouth, and, though somewhat familiarized with the presence of greatness, I felt it beating hard against my side as I mounted the stairs and stood in the

second passage. Here a bewildering consciousness came over me of being surrounded by beautiful things; for the walls were covered with objects of virtue. Arranged on baskets and mounted in frames, Etruscan vases, statuettes and fragments of antique sculpture, met the eye at every glance. But we had no time for a second look; for, coming through the drawing-room door, was an old man, quite bald, except a few soft, white locks that floated around his temples and back of the head. He came forward with one hand extended, and with a bright, cordial smile beaming all over one of the pleasantest faces I ever saw. A father could not have received us more cordially. Without relinquishing my hand, after the first generous clasp, he drew it through his arm and led me into the drawing-room, where several persons were assembled.

In this room I began to realize how much of enchantment surrounded the poet in his home. The view from the great bay window, which swept in a semicircle across the lower end of the room, framed in a sketch of the Green Park was absolutely enchanting. The grass was so richly green, the foliage of the great drooping elms so vivid! Indeed I never saw anything so beautiful in my life as that one picture of living green framed in by a single window.

The room itself fifty people



ROGERS' MANSION IN ST. JAMES' PLACE.

have described, yet I never obtained the slightest idea of it, or really of the old poet who stood smiling upon me, evidently pleased by the admiration I had no desire to suppress.

All have heard of the marble hand, that exquisite bit of sculpture resting on its cushion

of velvet—of the pictures so carefully chosen from the best collections in the world—of the Etruscan vases, the gems of art, so minute and varied, that no pen can describe them; but the arrangements, the harmony, and contrast, the exquisite effect produced by a mind full of

poetic taste, no pen can describe. This is the perfume which lingers around a white lily, invisible, but felt in every sense.

The furniture of the room was of dark, heavy mahogany, upholstered with black, the carpet black, with a moss pattern of crimson running thickly over it. Everything of this kind was made subservient to the works of art that hung upon the wall. On the mantle-piece, which was of black marble, were two glass cases filled with wedding favors, knots of silver ribbon, and tufts of orange blossoms, all evidently a recent tribute. A bouquet of choice flowers filled a splendid vase on the table: and scattered around were numberless pretty and curious articles, all gifts from a host of friends who loved the good old man to his last hour.

All this time I had neither been seated nor taken off my bonnet; in fact, no one seemed to be aware that I had one on. So, as every one seemed free and easy, I laid my bonnet and mantilla on a chair, which everybody seemed to think a matter of course, and found myself chatting with the company present. One of them was a nobleman, and something better than that; another was one of the most learned men in England. In the pleasantest way imaginable, I remember, Mr. Rogers made a little effort to draw out my opinion of his pictures, but I took refuge in my inexperience and begged him to spare me, promising to be very wise and opinionative after I had studied the great galleries of Europe—a rash promise, for merely looking at pic-

I don't know how breakfast was announced. A genteel young fellow, in black, appeared in the door a moment, caught his master's eye, and glided away. The result was, Mr. Rogers gave me his arm, and led the way down stairs into a room below, corresponding in size and almost in appearance with the one we had left. The same broad, high window framing in that

ROGERS' RECEPTION ROOM, WITH BOW-WINDOW LOOKING INTO THE GREEN PARK.



tures does not make one a judge, though half our traveled Americans seem to think so.

This frank disclosure seemed to amuse the dear old gentleman immensely, and he took great pains to point out the merits of his pictures, protesting that I knew a great deal more about the subject than my confession warranted, which was very polite, but not in the least correct.

Arcadian view, and giving glimpses of a flower garden close to the house, all in a glow of blossoms. The same display of noble pictures, by the old masters, with a Sir Joshua and other modern gems. Here also was the heavy side-board, carved by Chantrey, when he first commenced his art, from Mr. Rogers' own design. On the oblong breakfast-table stood a splendid bouquet, the gift of some lady friend, under a glass case, which was not removed till we seated ourselves, when the perfume gathered under the case was set free and floated dreamily over the table.

Two young men, both evidently educated and intelligent, waited at the breakfast, filling the transparent china cups with delicious coffee, passing grated ham, tiny French rolls, and *such* butter, with a quietness that made their presence almost unnoticed. The things I have mentioned, with boiled eggs, snowy as the napkin in which they rested, composed the heavier portion of the breakfast. Sweetmeats were introduced, with which Mr. Rogers occasionally fed my friend, a young lady on his left, from his own spoon, she receiving the gallant courtesy with a charming blush.



ROGERS, FROM A PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN THE YEAR HE DIED.

We remained at the table from ten till one, or rather around the table; for conversation followed close upon the coffee, and such conversation as one joins in but once or twice in a life time. Among the guests that morning was Mr. Babbage, a small, genial person, with light hair and a pleasant countenance; Sir David Brewster, tall, handsome, and benign, with a certain sweet gravity of conversation, that impressed you with a sense of innate power; and Mrs. Jamison, whom Mr. Rogers introduced to us as "the best judge of pictures in all England."

Certainly I never saw a woman more engrossed by any subject. She could scarcely find time to taste of the delicate repast, but soon turned her chair half way from the table, and began to descant on the crimson tints in the robe of a Madonna which hung before us—that rare crimson tint, which, she informed us, was now lost to the art.

Sir David became interested in the subject, and, at last, so absorbed that the two broke away from the general conversation, and lost themselves in a contemplation of the picture. This, after a little, seemed to annoy Mr. Rogers. He bent his head over his plate and muttered,

"I hope they enjoy themselves," in a voice that he probably fancied unheard. Instantly some one put a direct question to Mrs. Jamison, which drew both her and Sir David back to the circle, evidently quite unconscious of any offence; at which Rogers began to smile again, and the conversation flowed on as before.

I don't know how it was brought about, but in a break of the conversation Rogers began to tell a story: it was a simple German tale of a woman who had been buried alive—who escaped from the tomb and returned home, where she found her husband mourning for her on the hearth. I never heard anything more impressively told. We all sat breathless, listening, as the bereaved husband did when he heard his wife's knock at the door. Just at this point the servant came in with a dish in his hand. Mr. Rogers had lifted his finger, and bent his head as one listens for an expected sound. The servant saw his attitude and stopped, motionless, on the threshold, where he stood like a statue, scarcely seeming to draw his breath. I never shall forget the

thrilling effect of the poet's voice as he repeated, after describing the anxious attitude of the husband, "That's her knock!—that's her knock!" His voice was scarcely above a whisper, but it hushed the very breath on your lips.

When the story was done, and we began to recover from its effect, the servant left his frozen attitude and glided into activity again. Indeed it seemed as if this young person was a portion of the poet's own intelligence, for he seemed to understand the slightest look or motion addressed to him. Indeed, unlike any other English servant I ever saw, he hovered around the outskirts of the conversation, and was frequently referred to by both the master and his guests as authority regarding books and works of art. Most English servants make it a part of their duty to study immobility of countenance, till one almost forgets that they are anything more than well appointed machines; but this young gentleman—for in manners and intelligence he was all that a gentleman should be—followed the conversation with his eyes while he waited with his hands. He kept a record of Mr. Rogers' friends, of his reading engagements and correspondents: in fact, was a second mind to the good old man, who evidently regarded him more as a friend than as a servant.

I happened to speak of an English lady of high literary reputation, with whom we had dined the day before, who had spoken of Mr. Rogers as a personal friend. He did not at once recognize the name, and seemed doubtful if he knew the lady.

"Wait a moment," he said, "while I ring for my memory."

He touched a bell, and the young secretary-servant came in.

"Do I know Mrs. ——?" inquired Mr. Rogers, blandly.

"Slightly, sir," was the answer. "You met her at Lord N——'s: It was a dinner."

"Ah! yes, true enough, I do know her," said the poet, turning to me; "a charming woman, I believe!"

But of our dear home poetess, Mrs. Sigourney, he had a much more perfect recollection. He quoted her sayings and her poetry more than once during the morning, and complained with pleasant affectation of anger against the severe etiquette of her letters.

"Why she writes to me as if I were a saint, or a prince of the blood," he said, laughing, "not as a good old friend who would give the world to kiss her hand."

"But," said I, "you forget how much we all reverence and look up to you on our side the

water—Mrs. Sigourney, above all others, whose beautiful character is half made up of homage, first to the Creator, and then to genius which springs from Him. In her admiration of greatness, she always forgets that she herself is great."

"But I don't want to be revered like a saint, or a grandfather," he said, evidently enjoying the contest. "I'm not old enough for that [the poet was, I believe, ninety that year.] Why don't she begin her letters with, 'My dear old friend,' for that I am, and because she has given me the pleasure of this morning: more so now than ever," bowing to the Americans present. "Then there is another thing, she always will stand on forms about letters. Why can't she write every month? Be so good as to tell her all this, and have it rectified when you get home."

I promised faithfully, protesting, at the same time, that my letters, if they were natural, would be impulsive enough to make him cry out for forms and reverence again.

I really would like to repeat the whole conversation of that morning exactly as it arose. But the fine old poet blended so completely the genius of an author with the exquisite tact of a man who contrasts the best elements of society, that a repetition of his considerate kindness, his delicate arrangements to one's self, and one's country, would sound like egotism; besides, to give them correctly, one must convey the gentle suavity, the low voice, and exquisite delicacy of manner, which is beyond the gift of any pen.

After breakfast, we broke up into pairs and became more intimate with the pictures. Mr. Rogers benevolently took charge of my ignorance, unconscious of the fact, and seemed delighted when I selected his favorites for especial admiration.

There was one picture hanging near the window, on a swing frame, which commanded a perfect light. I am not quite sure of the old master, but know that the picture is of a value proportioned to its rare beauty. It was a woman with a child on her lap, and a bird perched on her hand: to its leg a string was attached which the child held, and a wild, eager little fellow he was.

"See, see," cried Mr. Rogers, seeming to partake of the child's excitement, "see how eagerly he watches the bird: he is inspired to the very tips of his little toes."

And so he was, hands, feet and face. It seemed as if the bird would fly in a moment, and the child leap out of the picture after it. Then the sweet, matronly interest visible in

the mother! it was a picture of which one's heart judged first, and as mine spoke honestly, I dare say it pleased the old gentleman better than a criticism. At any rate, when we turned away from it, I had another pressing invitation to breakfast, and so on during every week of our stay in London.

I had intended to tell you more of all this

charming month; and, above all, to describe our visit to the Park, nearly two years after, when we returned from our travels over Europe; but this one breakfast has taken up all the room allotted by that abominable tyrant, the printer. So I take my leave of the subject, as Mr. Rogers took leave of us cordially in the hall of his delightful home.

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